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## Eastern Canada's merger plan

There is a lot of logic behind the proposal for union of Canada's three Maritime provinces—New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

The merger proposal, contained in a report drafted after a two-year study by a special commission, will be debated by the three provincial premiers at a meeting in Halifax January 26.

The recent crisis in Quebec Province has prompted many people in the Maritimes to take a closer look at the advantages of union. If Quebec were ever to separate from the Canadian confederation, the Maritimes would be isolated from the rest of Canada. In any case they could operate much more efficiently as a single entity, advocates of fusion say. Moreover, they would be better able to pull themselves up by their bootstraps economically.

Economist Dr. John Deutsch, who acted as consultant to the Maritime union study group, is one of the strongest voices in favor of a merger. He says the three provinces must unite in the next 10 years or be prepared to live forever with their poverty, frustrations and near-colonial status.

At present their economy depends mainly on fishing, forestry, and agriculture. Unemployment is well above the national level, and thousands of young

people have emigrated to other parts of Canada and to the United States in search of jobs.

As it is, the three provinces depend on the federal government in Ottawa for 50 percent of their public revenue. Inevitably they find themselves competing with each other for much needed investment hand-outs.

For the time being at least, the union would not include Newfoundland, apparently because that island's territorial dispute with Quebec over Labrador would raise too many problems. At present mineral-rich Labrador is administered as part of Newfoundland.

The federal government has yet to make known its views on the merger plan. Presumably it is waiting to see how the talks among the three provincial premiers go. It would be a mistake to expect too much from the Halifax meeting, which will probably be mainly exploratory.

Union would not be an overnight panacea for the Maritimes' problems. The risk is that it would lead to a dilution of the provinces' individualism and personality. On the other hand it could well provide more efficient government and greater opportunities for economic growth.